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ATTITUDES AND LANGUAGE USE OF (POTENTIAL) NEW SPEAKERS OF A MINORITIZED LANGUAGE: THE CASE OF ADULTS LEARNING WEST FRISIAN IN FORMAL COURSES

Summary. Adults learning a minoritized language are potential new speakers, that is “adults who acquire a socially and communicatively consequential level of competence and practice in a minority language” (Jaffe, 2015; see also O’Rourke, Pujolar, & Ramallo, 2015). New speakers’ research has become quite common recently, marking a shift from traditional notions of speakerness in minority contexts, built around the Fishmanian discourse of reversing language shift (see Kubota, 2009). The new speaker —actually neo-speaker— is one of the seven categories put forward by Grinevald and Bert (2011), who considered them central to language revitalization. Answering the call for more data on new speakers of minoritized languages in O’Rourke, Pujolar, & Ramallo, 2015, this research aims to start the debate on the new speakers of Frisian (see Belmar, 2018; Belmar, Eikens, Jong, Miedema, & Pinho, 2018; and Belmar, Boven, & Pinho, 2019) by means of a questionnaire filled in by adults learning the language in the evening courses offered by Afûk. This article presents an analysis of their backgrounds, their attitudes towards the language, and their language use.

Keywords: West Frisian; new speakers; language revitalization; minoritized language; language attitudes; minority language learners.

Introduction

The recent increase in the interest for new speakers of minoritized languages, especially in the field of sociology of language (although not exclusively, see for example, Kasstan, 2017), has highlighted the importance of this speaker profile in language revitalization contexts. In fact, claims have been made that the survival of minoritized languages very often depends on non-speakers learning the language and adopting it as their own, or at least being able to understand it (e.g., Grinevald & Bert, 2011).

Despite the alleged importance of this speaker profile for the survival of minoritized languages —or perhaps because of it—, many studies have found controversial and even paradoxical discourses surrounding new speakers.

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In the case of Corsican, for example, Jaffe (2015) claims that native-like competence is the reference to measure the success of language learning, but she also notes how unlikely it is for anyone in Corsica to have native-like command of Corsican in all domains. In other words, new speakers are encouraged to look up to an authority that Jaffe claims does not exist. In the Basque context, Ortega, Urla, Amorrortu, Goirigolzarri and Uranga (2015) found an interplay between the notions of authenticity, identity and legitimacy, noting that members of the community clearly distinguish between being a Basque speaker and being able to speak Basque. These issues seem to go even further in the Gaelic context, in which McLeod and O'Rourke (2015) affirm that new speakers and native speakers even see themselves as totally separate communities. Issues of authenticity and legitimacy also seem to feature prominently in the discourse around new speakers of Galician, in which new speakers fail to identify themselves as 'real' or legitimate speakers of the language (O'Rourke & Ramallo, 2015).

West Frisian

West Frisian is spoken in the province of Fryslân, in the Netherlands, as well as in some neighbouring villages in the province of Groningen. Of the 646,317 inhabitants of the province (Provinsje Fryslân, 2015a), 54% reported West Frisian —henceforth referred to as simply Frisian— as their mother tongue (approximately 350,000 people), 35% claimed their mother tongue was Dutch and 11% reported another mother tongue —a percentage that includes not only migrant languages, but also Bildts, City Frisian, Hylpers and the Low Saxon varieties spoken along the border with Groningen and Drenthe (Provinsje Fryslân, 2015b). Therefore, taking into account that 75% (480,000 people) of the population claims to be able to speak the language and 54% (350,000 people) of the population reports Frisian to be their mother tongue (Provinsje Fryslân, 2015b), one must conclude that there are approximately 130,000 new speakers of Frisian in Fryslân.

Legal Recognition

Frisian is co-official, alongside Dutch, in the province of Fryslân (Bijlagen II, 1993/1994, 23543, 3, p. 8 (MvT), as referenced in Laanen, 2001, p. 69), and the Dutch government considers it to be one of the indigenous languages of The Netherlands (Bijlagen II, 1993/1994, 23543, 3, p. 2 (MvT), as referenced in Laanen, 2001, p. 68). It is worth-mentioning, however, that the Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands makes no reference to language (Laanen, 2001, p. 72), and neither did the Dutch constitution until 2010, when Dutch and Frisian were included as the only official languages of the Netherlands (Hilton & Gooskens, 2013, p. 140).

Knowledge of Frisian

In 2015, 95% of the inhabitants of Fryslân claimed to be able to understand the Frisian language to some extent —‘very good’, ‘good’ or ‘pretty comfortably’—, about 75% reported to be able to speak the language, about 78% claimed to be able to read it and only 32% claimed to be able to write it (Provinsje Fryslân, 2015b). These values were very similar to those registered in 1994, 2007 and 2011 respectively, with the exception of written proficiency, which has increased from a 17% to a 32% (Provinsje Fryslân, 2015b; Gorter, Riemersma, & Ytsma, 2001).

Attitudes towards Frisian

In his attitudinal study in 1995, Ytsma surveyed 410 children and 220 adults and found that while children generally did not significantly favour one language over the other, Dutch-speaking parents held negative attitudes towards Frisian in almost all measures (Ytsma, 1995). These results, as pointed out in Hilton and Gooskens (2013), may be understood as a sign that the attitudes towards Frisian worsen with time or that the new generation holds a more positive view of Frisian. Similar results were found in Gorter and Jonkman (1995) and Ytsma (2007), showing a wide gap between the attitudes of Frisian speakers and non-Frisian speakers. In addition, comparisons

between speakers and non-speakers revealed that, albeit higher than that of non-speakers, the attitudes held by the speakers of the minoritized language were still fairly negative. In the Frisian context, in fact, Frisian-speakers hold negative attitudes towards their own language (as found in Gorter, Jelsma, Plank, & Vos, 1984; Ytsma, 1995; Gorter & Jonkman, 1995; Hilton & Gooskens, 2013).

In an article published in the Frisian-language magazine *De Moanne* on October 11th 2013, Henk Wolf claims that “net sprekkers fan it Dútsk yn Dútslân bliuwe net salang net-sprekkers. Net-sprekkers fan it Sorbysk of Noard-Frysk yn Dútslân bliuwe oer it general altyd net-sprekkers” [Non-speakers of German in Germany do not remain non-speakers for long. Non-speakers of Sorbian or North Frisian in Germany generally always remain non-speakers]. As he also points out, however, this may be due to a manifested unwillingness of non-speakers to learn the language, but it is often just as much due to the invisibility to which speakers themselves subject these languages: “Komt in net-sprekker in sprekker tsjin, dan krije de lijerige taal net te hearren (...) Sa wurdt de lijerige taal stachoan in groepstaaltsje foar ynwijden” [If a non-speaker speaks with a speaker, he will not get to hear the ‘suffering’ language (...) Thus the ‘suffering’ language slowly becomes an ‘in-group language’] (Wolf, 2013)*.

Finally, some studies have shown that top-down policies for language promotion may have a positive effect on attitudes among both speakers and non-speakers of the language (e.g., Newman, Trenchs-Parera, & Ng, 2008 on Catalan in Catalonia). This, however, does not seem to be the case for Frisian. According to Hilton and Gooskens (2013) the situation has not changed, despite the increasing institutional support for Frisian. Non-Frisian speakers continue to be ‘largely negative’ towards Frisian, especially those living in Fryslân. This general negative attitude towards Frisian has reportedly had a negative effect on new speakers of the language. Especially in the city of Ljouwert, opportunities to practice the language are very scarce, and speaking Frisian may still be frowned upon (Belmar et al., 2018).

* Translation from the Frisian original is mine. Single quotation marks are also mine.

Use of Frisian

In 2011, 47.9% of the respondents indicated that the language they used the most with their children was Frisian, followed closely by Dutch (47.7%), and only 4.4% claimed they used another language. As for their partners, most people seemed to use Dutch (46.6%), followed by Frisian (45.4%) and 8.1% used another language (ProvinsjeFryslân, 2011).

Use on Social Media Platforms

Jongbloed-Faber, Velde, Meer and Klinkenberg (2016) claimed that 56% of Frisian teenagers used the Frisian language on social media to some extent — up to 87% of those who have Frisian as their sole mother tongue—, even though Dutch appeared to be the preferred language.

Methodology

Our study targeted adults enrolled at the Frisian-language courses offered by Afûk. 21 teachers were employed to teach the 25 courses which were taking place at the time when this research was conducted (February and March 2018).

Three different kinds of language courses are offered, with two levels each: LearmarFrysk —for those who do not know any Frisian but wish to learn it—; PraatmarFrysk —for those who understand Frisian but wish to speak it—; and SkriuwarFrysk —for those who want to improve their writing skills in Frisian. The courses consist of 10 lessons of two hours each, and cost 110€, which includes the coursebook, a Frisian-Dutch dictionary and complete access to eduFrysk —a partially free digital learning platform which people can use anywhere to practice their Frisian.

Participants

Adults registered at the Afûk Frisian-language courses were asked to participate in the study, which resulted in a sample size of 148 participants:

86 females and 62 males; mean age of 49, range between 18 and 85. These courses took place in different locations in the province of Fryslân, with the exception of KM (Kursus op mat) which took place in Den Bosch (in Noord-Brabant).

In addition, 21.6% of the participants (32) identified as native speakers of Frisian, who were taking course to increase their proficiency, especially their writing skills. This group has been maintained as part of the population of this study in order to compare their attitudes with those of non-natives.

Materials

The materials used in this study consisted of a 20-item questionnaire. In this article, the questions related to motivation will not be taken into consideration.

The questions were based on the findings of a pilot study (Belmar et al., 2018) and interviews with people from Afûk, the organization offering the Frisian courses. Three Social Media Platforms —Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp— were added to the list of settings where one might use the Frisian language. According to Statista (2018), by number of daily users, WhatsApp and Facebook are the two most widely used Social Media Platforms in the Netherlands. They are followed by YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter, in this order. For the purpose of this study, Twitter was chosen, since users are more likely to write, and there is previous literature on the use of Frisian on this particular platform (see Jongbloed-Faber, Velde, Meer, & Klinkenberg, 2016).

Procedure

Data Collecting

The questionnaires were sent by post to all the teachers who were giving lessons at the time. The researcher also sent all teachers an email explaining the aim of the research and asking them to have their students fill in the questionnaires during regular class time. In some cases, however, this was not possible, and teachers allowed students to take the questionnaire home

and bring it back the following day. The students filled in the questionnaires without a time limit.

Data Processing

The values of the negative attitude statements were reversed in order to get an attitude score by adding up the values. In other words, an attitude score was calculated for each participant —6 being the lowest score possible and indicating an extremely negative attitude towards the language; and 30 being the highest score, showing an extremely positive attitude towards it. These attitude scores were then averaged. Similarly, the values of the language use Likert-scale were added up in order to get a language use score for each participant —65 being the highest score possible and indicating the participant use Frisian always in all the situations suggested; and 13 being the lowest score possible, indicating the participant never uses Frisian in these situations.

A regression analysis was done to find out the relationship between attitudes, gender and native language. Finally, a Pearson r correlation was used to establish the relationship between the attitudes towards Frisian and the use of the language.

Results*

Self-rated Proficiency

Unsurprisingly, participants rated their Dutch-language skills the highest, followed by English. The self-rated proficiency in German was comparatively lower for a language most of the participants had studied at school. For Frisian, 83.8% of the participants claimed to be able to understand Frisian ('very good', 'good' or 'pretty comfortably'), 38.5% to be able to speak it, 78.4% to be able to read it and only 32.6% claimed to be able to write it.

* The data used in this paper was included in Belmar (2018).

Attitudes

Total scores for attitude were calculated for each language, with values between 6 —very negative attitude— to 30 —very positive attitude. Participants have the most positive attitude towards Dutch ($M = 26$, $SD = 3.5$), followed closely by English ($M = 23.9$, $SD = 4.2$). Their attitude towards Frisian is lower, but it is still positive ($M = 20.4$, $SD = 4.6$). In fact, according to the participants, Frisian seems to be the language which they consider more beautiful, and over half of the participants (56%) consider it to be useful. However, only 30.4% think it is necessary, and up to 47.3% view it as a difficult language to learn.

Table 1.

Participants' attitude scores

Language	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	sd
Frisian	20.4	6	30	4.6
Dutch	26	10	30	3.5
English	23.9	10	30	4.2
German	17.2	6	30	5.1

A simple linear regression was calculated to predict the attitude score towards the Frisian language based on gender and native language. A significant regression equation was found $F(2, 145) = 16.57$, $p < 0.001$ with $R^2 = 0.186$. On average, native speakers held more positive attitudes towards Frisian ($M = 16.97$; $SD = 4$) than non-native speakers ($M = 12.13$; $SD = 4.6$). For gender, no significant influence was found at $p < 0.05$.

Table 2.

**Regression coefficients for the linear model of attitudes towards
Frisian as a function of gender and native language**

	Estimate	SE	t-value	p-value
Intercept	17.21	0.79	21.72	<2e-16***
GenderMale	-1.30	0.76	-1.72	0.09
SpeakNonnative	-4.46	0.91	-4.90	2.5e-06***

Language use

Most participants use for the most part Dutch (76.4%) —only Dutch (46.6%), more Dutch than Frisian (28.4%) or more Dutch than English (1.4%). 13.5% of the participants use more Frisian than Dutch, and 7.4% claim to use both of these languages equally. While only 21.2% of participants say they never use Frisian and 24% claim they use it rarely, 31.5% claim that they use the language every day and 23.3% say they use it at least sometimes.

However, when participants try to speak Frisian outside the classroom, only 35.7% of the participants report that their interlocutors respond in Frisian, that is, a large majority responded in Dutch when addressing somebody in Frisian outside the classroom. In fact, 30.8% of the participants claim their interlocutor quickly changes to Dutch when they start struggling with Frisian; 20.3% of the participants affirm that they are always replied to in Dutch, and 13.3% say that their interlocutors only use Frisian if they are asked to.

81.1% of the participants claim that they speak Frisian to some of the people suggested in the survey. The majority reportedly speaks Frisian with their Frisian teachers (64.9%) and their classmates (60.8%). Between 30 and 40 percent of the participants claim that they use Frisian with their partners (39.2 %), with friends (36.5%), with colleagues (34.5%) and with family members (30.4%). Finally, only 20.3% uses the language with their children.

61.5% claim to feel comfortable when speaking Frisian to some of the people suggested in the survey. Half of the participants feel comfortable when speaking Frisian with their classmates, followed closely by their teachers (48.6%). The percentages drop drastically, and just over 30 percent feel comfortable when using Frisian with their partners (31.1%), followed by friends (29.7%), family members (26.4%) and colleagues (25.7%). Finally, only 18.2% of the participants claim to feel comfortable when speaking Frisian to their children.

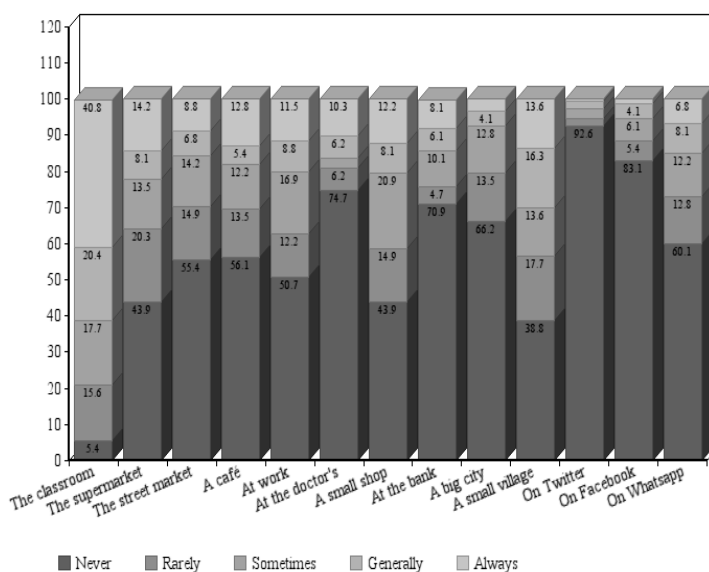


Fig. 1. Participants' frequency of use of Frisian in each situation

Even though most of the participants use the Frisian language in class (78.9%) at least sometimes, most of them do not use it in any other situation or do so only rarely. Other than the classroom, the situations where they are more likely to use the language are (see Figure 1): in a small village (43.5%), in a small shop (41.2%), at work (37.2%), at a supermarket (35.8%), in a café (30.4%), in a street market (29.8%) and on WhatsApp (27.1%). On the other hand, participants are much less likely to use Frisian at the bank (24.3%), in big cities (20.3%), at the doctor's (19.2%), on Facebook (11.6%) and on Twitter (5.4%).

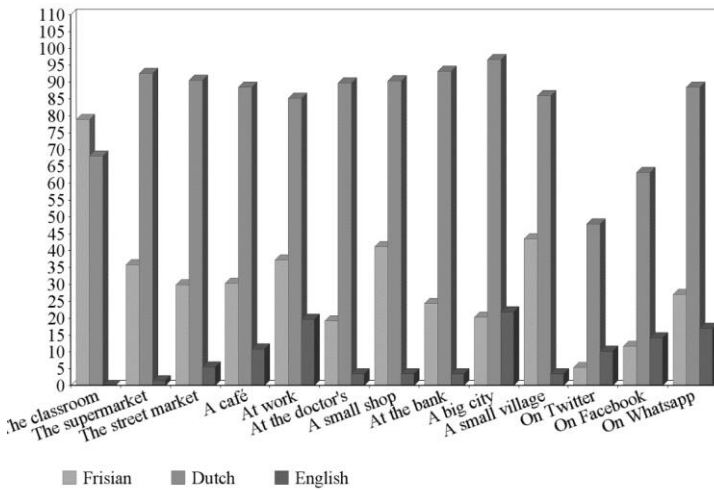


Fig. 2. Percentage of participants who use each language in each situation

In everyday use, Dutch overwhelmingly dominates in each situation, with the exception of the classroom, where Frisian remains the most used language. It is also worth noting, however, that the use of English only surpasses that of Frisian in big cities, on Twitter and on Facebook, which may be explained by a more international target audience.

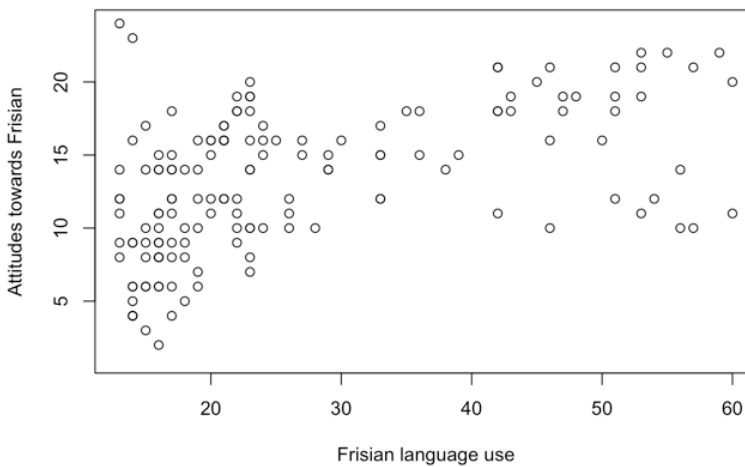


Fig. 3. Plot attitudes towards Frisian and Frisian language use

In addition, a positive correlation between attitudes and language use was found, $r(146) = 0.51, p < ,0.001$. The more positive the attitudes they hold towards Frisian, the more the participants used the language.

Discussion*

The results of this study give us an overview of the new speaker profile in the West Frisian context (see Belmar et al., 2019, for a study of the motivation of new speakers of West Frisian). Typically, these are middle-aged Dutch nationals born outside the province of Fryslân (66.2%) and they have completed some sort of higher education. They seem to decide to learn Frisian quite early on —42.2% of the participants had only been living in Fryslân for less than a year—, they identify as ‘mostly Dutch’ (61.5%) and as ‘learners of Frisian’ (62.8%) —only 13.5% identify as ‘new speaker of Frisian’— and they are plurilingual —most of them report some proficiency in at least four languages: Dutch, English, German and Frisian; and around 15% of the participants claim to have some proficiency in a fifth language. There is also a sizeable proportion of people born in Fryslân (29.7%), some of whom actually identify as ‘native speakers’ of the language (21.6% of all participants). These were all enrolled in courses aimed at developing their writing skills. Finally, there is a small percentage of people born outside the Netherlands who are also learning the language (4.1%).

Proficiency

Most participants report that they can understand Frisian to some degree, both in listening and reading. However, when the data for this set of participants is compared to the self-reported proficiency in the 2015 Fryske taalAtlas, it is surprising to see how similar they look. Speaking skills are significantly lower among learners, but writing skills are very similar. In other words, the percentage of people reporting the ability to write in Frisian is almost the same

* I would like to express the deepest appreciation to Professor Eva J. Daussà from the Department of Minorities and Multilingualism of the University of Groningen for her advice during the research process.

among learners (of whom only 21.6% were native speakers) as it is in the province as a whole (where native speakers make up 54% of the population) (see Figure 4). This data suggests that despite revitalization programs and new policies favorable to Frisian, writing skills in the language are still extremely low, which may be due to the unfavorable position —or even exclusion— of the language in most schools throughout the province (see Jager & Meer, 2007).

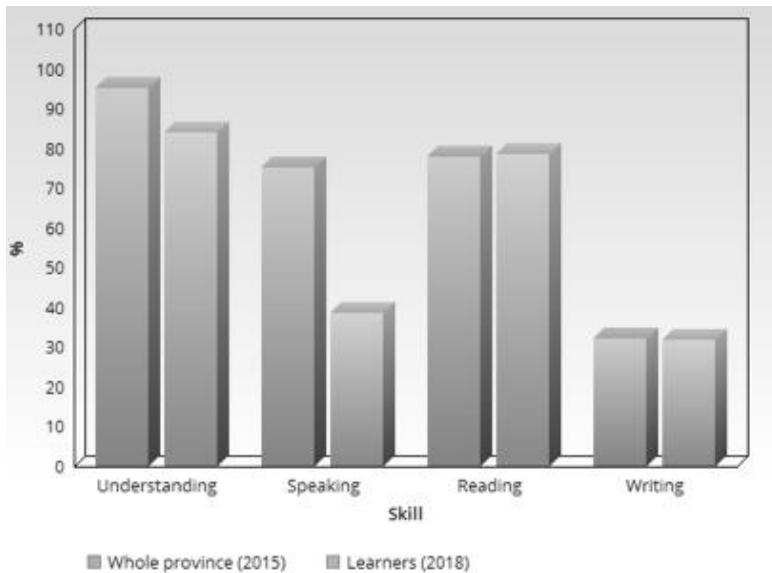


Fig. 4. **Self-reported proficiency in Frisian in Fryslân as compared to self-reported proficiency of the participants (Provinsje Fryslân, 2015b)**

Attitudes

Nativeness was found to be a significant predictor for attitudes towards Frisian (see Table 2). Recent policies favoring the promotion of the Frisian language, therefore, do not seem to have had any effect on overall language attitudes in Fryslân, not even among new speakers. This conclusion was also drawn from the results of Hilton and Gooskens (2013) and suggests that attitudes towards Frisian have not changed since 1995 (see Ytsma, 1995; Gorter & Jonkman, 1995).

Use

The classroom is the only setting where most participants claim to use Frisian to some extent. Most participants also claim to speak Frisian with their Frisian teacher and their classmates, and these are also the people they feel more comfortable with when speaking in Frisian. However unsurprising, this fact suggests that the province of Fryslân should include these settings in their periodical reports on the use of the Frisian language.

The Dutch language clearly dominates in all other settings, which may be explained by the fact that most participants report low speaking proficiency in Frisian. Similarly, the low writing proficiency found throughout the province, even among native speakers, could explain the low percentage of use of Frisian on social media platforms, especially Twitter and Facebook, where users may be exposed to criticism for any mistake they make (see Jongbloed-Faber et al., 2016). This low percentage, however, could also be due to audience design strategies (see Androutsopoulos, 2014 for further information), which would explain why the use of Frisian is more common in WhatsApp (27.1%).

Attitudes and use

As expected, a strong positive correlation was found between attitudes towards Frisian and Frisian language use (see Figure 3). Taking into account the fact that the attitudes towards the Frisian language were not particularly positive – especially among new speakers (see Table 2)—, we must conclude that it is desirable to understand the reasons behind the predominantly negative attitudes towards Frisian.

Conclusion

The number of new speakers of minoritized languages is rapidly increasing, and it is projected to become even more relevant in the following decades, outnumbering traditional native speaker communities in many contexts – which is already the case with Manx (Ó hÍfearnáin, 2015) and even a bigger language such as Irish (O'Rourke & Walsh, 2015). These new speakers are often said to be key for the success of revitalization processes, since they could

potentially reverse language shift (Grinevald & Bert, 2011). In fact, new speakers are generally the consequence of immersion or bilingual educational programs or adult language courses (Pujolar & O'Rourke, 2018) and some may even experience linguistic 'mudes' (Pujolar & Puigdevall, 2015) and adopt the minoritized language in their linguistic practices, moving from a 'monolingual habitus' to a 'multilingual repertoire' (Pujolar & O'Rourke, 2018).

In the case of Frisian, however, where over half of the population still claim to be native speakers of the language and where self-reported proficiency has been stable for the last twenty-one years, at least, new speakers adopting the language may not be necessary for maintenance, rather a desirable step towards balanced societal bilingualism in the province. More research needs to be done, especially to understand the reasons behind the negative attitudes towards the Frisian language, particularly among non-native speakers of the language. Taking into consideration claims made in previous literature on the effect of top-down policies in attitudes of speakers of the dominant language towards the minoritized language (e.g., Newman et al., 2008), understanding why this effect is not perceived in the Frisian context seems to be the next logical step.

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**NAUJŲ (POTENCIALIŲ) MARGINALIZUOTŲ KALBŲ VARTOTOJŲ
PAŽIŪROS IR KALBOS VARTOJIMAS: VAKARŲ FRYZŲ KALBOS
FORMALIŲ KURSŲ SUAUGUSIEMS ATVEJIS**

Santrauka. Suaugusieji, besimokantys marginalizuotos kalbos, yra potencialūs nauji jos vartotojai, tai yra, „suaugusieji, kurie įgyja socialiai ir komunikaciškai reikšmingą marginalizuotos kalbos kompetentingumo ir praktikavimo lygmenį“ (Jaffe, 2015; t. p. žr. O'Rourke, Pujolar ir Ramallo, 2015). Naujų vartotojų tyrinėjimai pastaruoju metu itin padažnėjo, ženklindami perėjimą nuo tradicinių kalbos vartotojų vertinimų mažumos kontekstuose, paremtą Fishman kalbos pokyčio atstatymo diskursu (žr. Kubota, 2009). Naujasis kalbos vartotojas – tiksliau, neo-kalbėtojas – yra viena iš septynių kategorijų, kurias pasiūlė Grinevald ir Bert (2011), laikę jas svarbiausiomis kalbos atgaivinimui. Atsiliepiant į O'Rourke, Pujolar ir Ramallo (2015) prašymą surinkti daugiau duomenų apie marginalizuotų kalbų naujus vartotojus, šiuo tyrimu ir siekiama pradėti diskusiją apie fryzų kalbos naujus vartotojus (žr. Belmar, 2018; Belmar, Eikens, Jong, Miedema ir Pinho, 2018; ir Belmar, Boven ir Pinho, 2019), pasitelkiant apklausą suaugusiesiems, besimokantiems šios kalbos vakariniuose kursuose, kuriuos siūlo Afûk. Šiame straipsnyje pateikiama analizė, kurioje nagrinėjama jų kilmė, požiūriai į kalbą ir jų kalbos vartojimas.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: Vakarų fryzų; nauji kalbos vartotojai; kalbos atgaivinimas; marginalizuota kalba; požiūriai į kalbą; besimokantieji marginalizuotų kalbų.